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ABSTRACT

This study, based on cultural stereotypes, seeks to determine the demographic characteristics which differentiate among young people and correlate with their levels of alienation. A preliminary version of an experimental scale, designed to determine the existence and extent of alienation manifested by in-school adolescents, was developed in a pilot study. The experimental instrument consisted of forty-seven forced-choice items written to reflect Seeman's five dimensions of alienation: normlessness, meaninglessness, powerlessness, self-estrangement, and social isolation. Seventy-five lower division college students completed the pilot version, and for validity and reliability purposes, also completed the Rotter I-E Scale. Then, adolescent groups from five ethnic backgrounds were studied by means of their responses to a demographic questionnaire and the revised experimental instrument. Variables suggested by the literature as relevant were sex, age, number of hours of weekly employment, grade-point-average, socioeconomic status, transiency and stability of family, parental approval of friends, solidarity with peers, and marital status of parents. Hypotheses involved relationships between these demographic variables and scores on the measure. Eleven hypotheses, related to the variables, findings relevant to them, and supporting statistical data are given. Mixed findings indicate the need for further exploration of the differences between groups with regard to such items as: number of hours of work outside of school, socio-economic status, and family stability. (LR)

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Black, White, and Brown Adolescent Alienation

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Alienation may exist whenever the stress of societal change creates anxiety, rootlessness, isolation, and apathy; and it represents the actual condition of life for many contemporary young people. Alienation is a multi-dimensional construct taken to mean conscious rejection or repudiation by an individual of expected roles, representing the values of his society. Infinite variations of alienation can be described in response to the following questions:

(1) Focus: Alienated from what?

(2) Replacement: What replaces the old relationship?

(3) Mode: How is the alienation manifest? and

(4) Agent: What is the agent of the alienation

Types of alienation include a sense of cosmic outcastness, developmental estrangement, historical loss, and self-estrangement.

It would seem vital to those who engage in direct contact with junior and senior high school students, and to those who are preparing teachers for these institutions, to have an understanding of the internal dynamics of members of the student body and their feelings about the educational experiences in which they are engaged. The major question involved in this study, based on cultural stereotypes, was: What demographic characteristics differentiate among young people and correlate with their levels of alienation?

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Instrument Development

In a pilot study, a preliminary version of an experimental scale was designed and tested to determine the existence and extent of alienation as manifested by in-school adolescents. The Rotter I-E Scale was selected for use in the pilot study. Because it had been validated almost entirely with adults, and inasmuch as the language was somewhat staid and formal for younger adolescents, it was utilized to supply criteria for assessing the concurrent validity of the new experimental instrument. The latter consisted originally of forty-seven forced-choice items written largely to include Seeman's five dimensions of alienation: normlessness, meaninglessness, powerlessness, self-estrangement, and social isolation. The items were written to translate Seeman's dimensions into operational terms and to make them comprehensible to adolescents. For example:

Normlessness:

_____I don't pay much attention to school rules.

_____I try to follow school rules.

Meaninglessness:

_____I have a clear idea of why I am in school.

_____I have never been sure of what we students were really in school for.

Powerlessness:

_____It doesn't do any good to vote in school elections, since the student government has no real voice in running the school.

_____It is important to vote in school elections, because student government has a voice in running this school.

Self-estrangement:

_____I spend a lot of my free time moving around, looking for something to do.

_____I usually know what I want to do in my spare time.

Social Isolation:

_____I don't like most people.

_____I can usually find some good in everyone.

The pilot version was compelted by seventy-five lower division college students. The Rotter I-E Scale was also administered to these subjects. Non-discriminating items were eliminated from the experimental scale which condensed it to forty-one items. Upon application of the Kuder-Richardson Formula 20, a reliability coefficient of .78 was estimated. The correlation between the total score and the Rotter Scale score was +.61.

Procedure

Five groups of adolscents were examined by means of their responses to a demographic questionnaire and the experimental instrument. Group 1, a sample of 134 Caucasian males and females was drawn from a suburban four-year Los Angeles County high school. Group 2, composed of 55 males were all black enrollees in a Job Corps Center for Men in California. Group 3, 681 males and females, came

from a predominantly black south-central Los Angeles high school. Group 4, 221 males and females, were from junior and senior facilities selected as target school for a Coro Foundation teacher education project. Group 5, composed of 137 males and females, all Mexican-American, were evaluated in a rural California school district.

Items suggested in the literature as probably relevant to feelings of alienation in adolescents included sex, age, number of hours of weekly employment, grade-point-average, socio-economic status, transiency and stability of family, parental approval of friends, solidarity with peers, and marital status of parents.

Hypotheses involved relationships between these demographic variables and scores on the measure of alienation. The eleven hypotheses and findings relevant to them are described below. Supporting statistical data are found in Tables 1, 2, and 3.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Five Youth Groups
On the Experimental Measure of Alienation

	N	Mean	S.D.	K-R Rel.
1. Suburban Caucasian HS Students	134	10.83	5.47	.797
2. Black Job Corps Enrollees	55	13.42	7.91	.890
3. Urban High School Students	681	11.89	5.24	.754
4. Urban Jr.-Sr. High Students	221	14.17	5.48	.750
5. Rural Mexican-American HS Students	137	12.45	5.55	.781

Table 2

Correlations between Demographic Characteristics and Scores on the Experimental Measure of Alienation

Demographic Characteristic	1	2	3	4	5
Sex	-.21*	----	.06	-.14*	-.04
Age	.12	----	.07	.00	.02
Hrs. of work/week	.02	.12	.14**	-.02	.04
Estimate of GPA	-.32**	-.25	-.23**	-.25**	-.32**
Father's education	-.21*	-.38**	.05	.03	-.10
Time at present residence	.11	-.06	.08*	.10	.04
No. of moves in last 5 years	-.16	-.03	-.06	-.16*	.06
Parental approval of friends	-.30**	.06	-.13**	-.29**	-.21
Solidarity with peers	-.33**	.32*	.00	-.19**	-.08
Marital status of parents	-.15	.04	-.17**	-.06	-.14

* significant at .05 level; ** significant at .01 level; ----coefficient not computed as sample was homogeneous on the characteristic.

Table 3

Z Ratios (Z Tests) Between Groups of Youths on Scores on the Experimental Measure of Alienation

Groups	1	2	3	4	5
1.		2.22*	2.06*	5.56**	2.41*
2.			1.41	0.67	0.93
3.				5.43**	1.08
4.					2.86**

* significant at .05 level; ** significant at .01 level
All tests are two-tailed, non-directional tests.

I. Sex: Due to differentially applied pressures of society on adolescent males and females, males are more likely to experience alienation than females in school settings. This hypothesis was supported in groups 1 and 4, and indicated, but not significantly, in groups 3 and 5.

II. Age: Alienation has often been described as progressive, therefore, the older the subjects, the greater the degree of alienation once the process has begun. This hypothesis was not supported.

III. Employment: Hours at work outside of the school setting indicate a focus into the larger community. The greater the number of hours of work, the greater the alienation. This hypothesis was supported and highly significant only for group 3, from a predominantly middle-class black high school. We might speculate that rising aspirations when compared with work opportunities strengthen feelings of alienation in black adolescents.

IV. Academic Achievement: Students' estimates of their grade-point-average proved to be highly significantly related to alienation scores. The hypothesis that the higher the grade-point-average the less the alienation, was supported in all five groups.

V. Socio-Economic Status: Using father's educational attainment as a measure of societal position, it was hypothesized that the higher the position, the less the alienation. Findings were mixed; supported and significant only for group 1 and group 2.

VI. Residential Status: Length of residence at a given address may facilitate the development of family solidarity, therefore, the less the transiency, the less the alienation. This hypothesis was not supported.

VII. Transiency: The number of changes of residence may also be an indicator of the involvement of the family cohessiveness with the

community. Therefore, the less the family transiency, the less the alienation. Findings were significant only for group 4, but were indicated by trends in three other groups.

VIII. Parental Approval of Friends: It was hypothesized that the greater the approval of friends, the less the alienation. The hypothesis was supported in four groups still enrolled in public school. For Job Corps enrollees, all aged nineteen or older, the parental-approval variable is no longer significantly related to alienation.

IX. Solidarity with Peers: The relationships of adolescents to their friends and confidants has been emphasized at length in both sociological and psychological literature. Therefore, the hypothesis that the greater the cohessiveness with peers, the less the alienation. Findings were inconsistent.

X. Marital Status of Parents: As an indicator of family stability, two parent families may be better able to provide support needed by the adolescent during this critical phase of his development, therefore, the greater the family stability as indicated by non-fractionated experience, the less the alienation. The hypothesis was significantly supported for group 3, indicated, but not significant, for groups 1, 4, and 5, but reversed for group 2. Once again, the older Job Corps enrollees exhibit attitudes not typical of younger peers.

XI. Ethnic and Racial Differences: Minority-group adolescents are more likely to exhibit alienation than are Caucasians, but no consistent trends were found to enable the ordering of minority-group adolescents on the alienation dimension.

Summary

Those demographic characteristics of adolescents that proved to be most highly significant are grade-point-average, parental approval of friends and solidarity with peers. Mixed findings indicate the need for further exploration of the differences between groups in regard to such items as the number of hours of work outside of school, socio-economic status, and family stability.

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